



The Fire Guardian

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The phone tree re-imagined

The Community Fireguard program in the Upper Beaconsfield community is going from strength to strength. There are quite a number of active groups along with some new groups in the process of being formed. The community is very “fire minded” with the events of Ash Wednesday always a conversational topic.

Although the township has its own telephone alerting system where residents “subscribe” for a minimal yearly fee, one Community Fireguard group has come up with their own version.



The system is also a phone alert tool but is localised and utilised by the three groups located along the road. The relay phone runs on a battery with a back up to safe guard in the instance phone or electricity becomes disconnected (which can be a common occurrence in these areas).

The beauty of this system is that during the fire season it can be located away from the risk area with no disruption to the service.

Groups simply message the relay number provided and indicate which group (or groups) the message is intended to be broadcast to. The system has done away with the “old style” phone trees we used to see within groups, which at times groups struggled to make work because of various limitations.

The groups agreed that it is a fantastic tool and something which can be utilised as an all year round tool for safety and security.

Connected community protecting environment

Chewton Bushlands, a picturesque community located just outside of Castlemaine has a long history of care and preservation of the native environment. At the centre of the community is the Chewton Bushlands Association (CBA), a long-standing group made up of 52 passionate community members.



CBA members are connected by their drive to preserve and protect the native environment and prepare their properties for fire. CBA's Chair, Antoniette Birkenbeli along with other members has been instrumental in the connection of this group.

Antoniette has also guided the learning journey of now active members Edwina and Paul Walsh after they settled into life in the community.

Edwina and Paul are relatively new members of CBA. About four years ago the pair bought what was intended as a “weekender”. Both living in St Kilda at the time, the Walsh’s fell in love and eventually decided to make the big move to regional living and thus began their journey of discovery, creativity and aspiration to preserve native flora and fauna.

Edwina and Paul quickly discovered CBA and shared in its purpose to preserve and protect the native environment and prepare their properties for fire. The pair’s regional move came with little knowledge of fire, so connecting in with CBA members and the Chewton brigade was the first step to learn about fire and prepare their property.

“We’re a believer in the science and the expert knowledge. Engaging with the experts is very important and has driven everything that we have done here. To that point, there is no way we would stay which we wouldn’t do anyway, but CFA really just reinforced that for me”, Edwina said.

Having lived in Chewton for 20 years, living with the risks fire poses has become second nature for Antoniette. With her daughter being impacted by the 2009 fires and her significant involvement the Chewton brigade, she says for this reason she has a “very personal attachment and appreciation” to CFA.

Connected community protecting environment continued...

For Edwina and Paul, Antoniette's knowledge and drive to keep the group connected has been a big support in starting their first steps in settling in and preparing their property. Early on, Antoniette connected Edwina and Paul with a local contact for guidance on clearing dead fallen trees, whilst ensuring preservation of any natural habitats for the local wildlife.

Edwina and Paul's second step of preparation was engaging with the Chewton brigade for a Property Advice Visit Service. This visit built their knowledge further, understanding where the fire would come from and where it would go. This led to their motivation to try and stop a possible fire in its tracks if it threatened their property and their neighbours'.

Over recent months, with permission from their neighbour they have begun tidying up the part of their neighbour's land that intersects with their property. This has meant tackling the abundance of coffee bush, blackberries and gorse.

The constant source of inspiration for Edwina and Paul has always been to regenerate the natural native environment and know that by doing so will provide better adverse fire properties in the vegetation. It has been a steady process of replanting native grasses and allowing more of the native flora and fauna to come back into the environment. Edwina expressed her excitement each time she discovers a new wildflower appear on their property - a sign that their efforts are being recognised.

Pictured below is a recent image of the lake on Edwina and Paul's property restored to its original beauty. After considerable time spent restoring the lake, it is now a delight for locals who drive past.



The established Chewton Bushlands Association Facebook group has been of great value for the group to stay connected. Antoniette describes the group as consistently having "a lot of chatter" about information on upcoming events, re-circulating useful resources, providing insight on edible native vegetation and updating the group on projects to get involved in. Following on from a ghastly summer season, the Facebook group is just one way the CBA stays connected to share in a greater sense of unity and connection in supporting each other prepare for fire.

What has your Community Fireguard group been doing to stay connected and support each other?

CFA would love to hear your stories.
communityprograms@cfa.vic.gov.au



Community Based Bushfire Management supports recovery

How do we encourage behaviour change and genuine shared responsibility for emergency preparedness? One way is to take a community development approach to reducing bushfire risk.

Community Based Bushfire Management (CBBM) is one such community development approach to bushfire risk reduction. CBBM aims to support communities to build resilience, through the development of community, agency and local government connections. What sets this approach apart is the simple step to building connections, providing all stakeholders with an opportunity to listen to and understand one another, and a genuine desire to work together in a mutually beneficial way. The development of connections and networks leads to information sharing, lessons learned and planning across the community. These connections ensure that hazards and risks such as bushfire, flood or economic disaster, are identified, and the community has the opportunity to develop and plan.

“It is exciting. This is the way I have been hoping and encouraging CFA to engage for years”

“With the right knowledge the community will accomplish far more than fire services ever could alone”

Black Summer fires

The 2019-20 fire season was perhaps the first time since 2009 that communities impacted by fire benefited so much from the strong social connectedness brought about by a community project. From Buchan to Mallacoota, Cann River to Club Terrace, one after another small communities felt the full force of the Black Summer fires.

Now, these communities are facing recovery in an almost unprecedented time of global pandemic. By having a community development-focused facilitator working with these communities, some contribution to a community-led recovery process has been provided. Cann River, Tamboon, Bruthen and Club Terrace have all been assisted in this way by the CBBM approach. However, without the opportunity for face-to-face debriefs with agency personnel or even each other, people in these communities have led their own recovery for many months. Although agencies, local government and others (such as Bushfire Recovery Victoria) are there to help, when it comes down to it locals are helping one another – as it always has been. With community comes resilience.

Community Based Bushfire Management supports recovery continued...

Community led recovery examples

- **Cann River**, where the local community is leading its own relief effort, including the restoration of the local hall which is an important local asset.
- **Tamboon**, where the community formed its own association to manage donated funds and to secure, among other things, a much-needed shed in which to store firefighting equipment.
- **Bruthen**, where the local community group has taken hold of recovery and is ensuring a truly diverse community voice is heard.
- **Club Terrace**, where residents are devising plans for the rebuilding or restoration of their local hall and sheds.
- The **Koori community in Cann Valley** is considering how it can be better prepared for future fires – including finding a safer way for their elders to evacuate and become more involved in cultural burning and vegetation management on their country. In addition, this community is working with Landcare Australia to devise plans to spend available funds to restore the land and prepare for another fire season.



What is Safer Together?

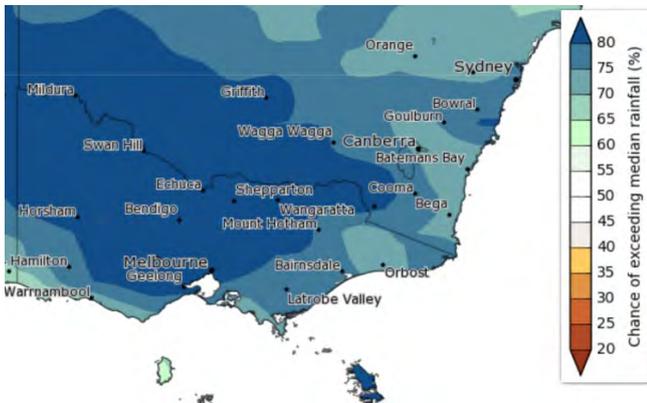
The Community Based Bushfire Management (CBBM) approach is funded by the Victorian Government's **Safer Together**.

Safer Together involves fire and land agencies working together with communities, combining in-depth local knowledge with the latest science and technology to reduce bushfire risk on both public and private land. Strategies and solutions are based on community values and risk is measured using local knowledge, field data and bushfire simulation technology.

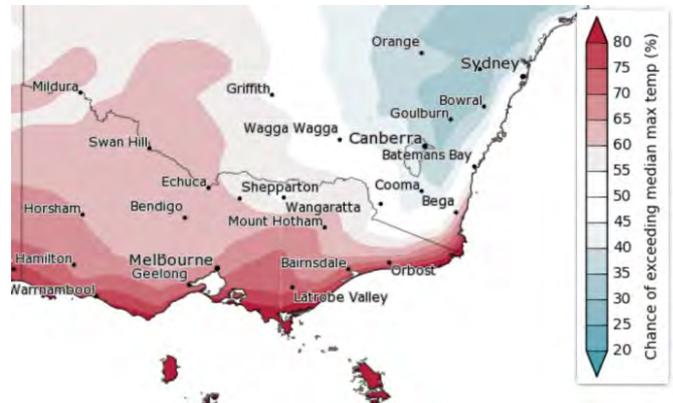
The Safer Together approach is funded by the Victorian Government until June 2021.

To find out more about the CBBM approach and Safer Together initiatives, go to safertogether.vic.gov.au

2020/2021 Climate outlook



Chance of exceeding median rainfall



Chance of exceeding median temperature

Overview

- For November to January days are very likely to be warmer than average across much of Victoria and South-East South Australia.
- Nights during November to January are very likely to be warmer than average across nearly all of Australia.
- The Bureau's El Niño and the Southern Oscillation Outlook is at La Niña, meaning La Niña is underway in the tropical Pacific.
- The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) index value is currently neutral, though models suggest negative values may return in October and persist in November.
- La Niña and a negative IOD typically increase the likelihood of above average rainfall across much of Australia during spring and early summer.
- November to January is likely to be wetter than average for nearly all of Australia (greater than 70% chance in most areas).

What does this mean for fire?

Eastern Australia is much wetter compared to the last several years with decreased fire risk. These conditions mean:

- There is a normal fire season predicted in Victoria.
- Parts of western Victoria – particularly around northern Wimmera are drier than last year, and although there is a signal for a wetter Spring, there is still uncertainty in the forecasts, which may mean that parts of western Victoria may still remain drier than normal.
- Under heatwave events or hot, dry and windy conditions there is still the expectation of short duration grass/crop fire risk as well as fire risk in dry woodland and dry forest types.

Supporting those at greatest risk

Is there someone in your community that needs extra support to prepare for fire?

CFA is currently leading a three-year multi-stakeholder project that aims to improve how bushfire preparedness plans are developed and acted on for those who are at greatest risk.

Who is at 'greatest risk'? (for the purpose of this project)

Individuals who have the potential to be adversely affected by a bushfire and who, because of the circumstances in their everyday lives, require significant and coordinated priority intervention, response and support from a variety of organisations and the broader community for their safety.

Project objectives

- To build the capability of the community and social services sector to develop bushfire plans with their clients at greatest risk in a bushfire.
- To target delivery of CFA fire prevention and preparedness services to people at greatest risk alongside local service providers and local government.

Achievements

Developed an e-learning module with supporting resources for workers to improve skills and knowledge about bushfire planning with their clients.



You can share or access the module and resources via cfa.vic.gov.au/workers

Work in progress

Developing a targeted service delivery program for those on the Vulnerable Persons Register and those who are at greatest risk but are not listed on the register.

What can you use from this project in your Community Fireguard group?

Watch the below videos and have a chat about how personal capacity could impact people in your community that need extra support.

[Mark and Jane - Wiseleigh](#)
[Delwyn - Lakes Entrance](#)

Consider doing the [e-learning module](#) developed.

Bushfire Places of Last Resort

Reducing the impact of bushfires is a shared responsibility between government, emergency service organisations and the community. The community plays an integral role in taking the necessary steps to prepare their property for bushfire, to understand their risk, to develop and be ready to implement their bushfire plan.

You need to be aware of and understand the full range of options available, including last resort options. Your backup plan should identify shelter and last resort options available to you, including those you have personally assessed as being a safer option relative to your particular situation if caught in a fire event.

A Neighbourhood Safer Place, also known as a Bushfire Place of Last Resort (NSP-BPLR) location in the near vicinity (neighbourhood) should be recorded in a backup plan. An NSP-BPLR may, as a last resort, provide a specified level of protection (a safer place) from the immediate life-threatening effects of a bushfire. An NSP-BPLR is an area or premises that provides separation distance from vegetation and protection from direct flame contact and excessive life-threatening levels of radiant heat.

There are currently 311 designated NSP-BPLRs across the state.



An important aspect of bushfire safety is the inclusion of a backup plan if your primary plan fails or your planned options are unable to be implemented (such as leaving the area early). All plans have the potential to fail, and it is impossible to predict all potential scenarios.

Please note that not every community in Victoria has a NSP-BPLR, CFA recommends that in developing a backup bushfire plan that you visit the [CFA website](#) to find out where the closet NSP-BPLR is to you and if it is practical to form part of your backup plan.

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